

Getting Ready for the “Real World” Mentoring Series

Mock Interview Questions



1. Can you tell me a little about yourself?

This question seems simple, so many people fail to prepare for it, but it's crucial. Here's the deal: Don't give your complete employment (or personal) history. Instead give a pitch—one that's concise and compelling and that shows exactly why you're the right fit for the job.

2. How did you hear about the position?

Another seemingly innocuous question, this is actually a perfect opportunity to stand out and show your passion for and connection to the company. If you discovered the company through an event or article, share that. Even if you found the listing through a random job board, share what, specifically, caught your eye about the role.

3. What do you know about the company?

Any candidate can read and regurgitate the company's "About" page. So, when interviewers ask this, they aren't necessarily trying to gauge whether you understand the mission—they want to know whether you care about it. Start with one line that shows you understand the company's goals, using a couple key words and phrases from the website, but then go on to make it personal. Say, "I'm personally drawn to this mission because..." or "I really believe in this approach because..." and share a personal example or two.

4. Why do you want this job?

Again, companies want to hire people who are passionate about the job, so you should have a great answer about why you want the position. First, identify a couple of key factors that make the role a great fit for you, then share why you love the company.

5. Why should we hire you?

There's no better setup for you to sell yourself and your skills to the hiring manager. Your job here is to craft an answer that covers three things: that you can not only do the work, you can deliver great results; that you'll really fit in with the team and culture; and that you'd be a better hire than any of the other candidates.

6. What are your greatest strengths?

When answering this question, interview coach Pamela Skillings recommends being accurate (share your true strengths, not those you think the interviewer wants to hear); relevant (choose your strengths that are most targeted to this particular position); and specific (for example, instead of "people skills," choose "persuasive communication" or "relationship building"). Then, follow up with an example of how you've demonstrated these traits in a professional setting.

7. What do you consider to be your weaknesses?

What your interviewer is really trying to do with this question—beyond identifying any major red flags—is to gauge your self-awareness and honesty. So, "I can't meet a deadline to save my life" is not an option—but neither is "Nothing! I'm perfect!" Strike a balance by thinking of something that you struggle with but that you're working to improve. Be sure to include specific examples of how you overcome your weaknesses.

8. Tell me about a challenge or conflict you've faced, and how you dealt with it.

In asking this question, "your interviewer wants to get a sense of how you will respond to conflict. Anyone can seem nice and pleasant in a job interview, but what will happen if you're hired and Gladys in Compliance starts getting in your face?" says Skillings.

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9. Where do you see yourself in five years?

If asked this question, be honest and specific about your future goals, but consider this: A hiring manager wants to know a) if you've set realistic expectations for your career, b) if you have ambition (a.k.a., this interview isn't the first time you're considering the question), and c) if the position aligns with your goals and growth.

10. What's your dream job?

Along similar lines, the interviewer wants to uncover whether this position is really in line with your ultimate career goals.

11. What are you looking for in a new position?

Hint: Ideally the same things that this position has to offer. Be specific.

12. What type of work environment do you prefer?

Hint: Ideally one that's similar to the environment of the company you're applying to. Be specific.

13. What's a time you exercised leadership?

Depending on what's more important for the role, you'll want to choose an example that showcases your project management skills (spearheading a project from beginning to end, juggling multiple moving parts) or one that shows your ability to confidently and effectively rally a team. And remember: "The best stories include enough detail to be believable and memorable," says Skillings. "Show how you were a leader in this situation and how it represents your overall leadership experience and potential."

14 How do you deal with pressure or stressful situations?

"Choose an answer that shows that you can meet a stressful situation head-on in a productive, positive manner and let nothing stop you from accomplishing your goals," says McKee. A great approach is to talk through your go-to stress-reduction tactics, and then share an example of a stressful situation you navigated with ease.

15. What do you like to do outside of work?

Interviewers ask personal questions in an interview to "see if candidates will fit in with the culture [and] give them the opportunity to open up and display their personality, too," says longtime hiring manager Mitch Fortner. "In other words, if someone asks about your hobbies outside of work, it's totally OK to open up and share what really makes you tick.

16. Do you have any questions for us?

You probably already know that an interview isn't just a chance for a hiring manager to grill you—it's your opportunity to sniff out whether a job is the right fit for you. What do you want to know about the position? The company? The department? The team?

Notes:
